



Making Social Care
Better for People



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Dear Colleagues

**ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF WORCESTER COUNTY COUNCIL’S
EDUCATION AND CHILDREN’S SOCIAL CARE SERVICES 2005**

This letter summarises the findings of the meeting held on 4 July 2005 to assess the performance of the education and social care services within your authority. We are grateful for the information which you provided to support this process and for the time made available by yourself and your colleagues to discuss relevant issues.

Being healthy

Outcomes in this area are generally good, particularly in the way that healthy lifestyles have been promoted through partnerships with key services. Of special note is the ISL (Integrated Support for looked after children - a partnership between the key services) which has made a significant difference to ensuring the health needs of looked after children are met effectively; health performance indicators exceed national averages. Adopters rated the service as excellent support to them and the adopted children.

There have been no drug-related deaths of children and young people under 18. The incidence of 16–18 pregnancy has declined considerably over the last two years. The foundations for reducing teenage pregnancies have been well laid and built on with targeted work with high-risk groups and specialist services, eg for young people with learning disabilities and young women from minority ethnic communities. The authority and partners have an action plan to address 10% of wards showing an increase in pregnancies in the 16-18 group. In a minority of schools there are inadequate arrangements for sex and relationships education. The proportion of schools already participating in the National Healthy Schools Standards is high. The limitations of some school kitchen and exercise facilities requires innovative approaches to meet the target. Most youth centres have projects promoting healthy lifestyles but need to develop how they report outcomes. The Education service has received the National Sportsmark award and there are high levels of participation in sports.

The actions taken to promote the mental health of children and young people are effective, and more children are able to access the services. The number of social

workers in multidisciplinary Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) teams has increased, referrals are prompt and those with acute needs receive a very prompt assessment. There are still waiting lists for some services and in some parts of the county. A range of specialist interventions is provided to all children and young people in targeted groups such as those with severe communication needs.

Staying safe

Outcomes in this area are very good with implementation of strategies monitored consistently and rigorously. All social care child protection indicators remain very strong. Multi agency child protection training is well resourced and attended. However, not all schools have implemented the Council's requirements for child protection and health & welfare, which are unsatisfactory in a small number of schools. Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) arrangements are fully in place. Serious case reviews have been well managed and efficiently notified with learning points incorporated into future planning.

There are protocols for transfer of information about children between authorities. Details of children removed from school roles are promptly referred to the Education Welfare Service. A high number of young people are educated other than at school; the Authority has worked hard to provide for their entitlement including in the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU). In a small number of children's homes staff needed to develop skills in engaging the young people in education, the issue is being addressed within a multi-disciplinary project to develop skills. Some homes needed an enhanced level of skill and greater continuity from the staff teams to support children with complex needs. The adoption service is good and regular monitoring of children and adopters by the local panel is excellent.

The authority has clear referral systems so that children at risk are identified early. Protocols with health are secure; children benefit from the excellent rates of completion of core (82.9%) assessments and improved initial assessments. Care plans are in place for all looked after children. Children in Need (CIN) referrals lead to initial assessments. Early intervention has increased as preventative and support services developed responsively. There has been a major reduction in the numbers of children who are looked after though children from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds (BME) are over represented amongst looked after children. The Council is targeting work with their communities to improve take up of preventative services.

All children on the child protection register have an allocated qualified social worker and looked after children have an allocated worker; all reviews are carried out within statutory timeframes. A protocol will enable the criteria for allocation to qualified workers to be fully met in 05/06. Strategies are child centred, all under 10 year old LAC and 84.1% of the total who are looked after, are in foster placements with local placement given a high priority, 91.9% of fostered children are placed within the County. The Authority has been successful in reuniting older children with their families

and most looked after children benefit from being in stable placements. Many of the looked after children are older and are unlikely to be adopted now. However, adoptions of younger children are at a high level and placements are made in timely manner.

A carers unit offers specialist and independent support to carers, and carers assessments are consistently offered. The take up of direct payments by families of children with disabilities has been promoted and is increasing monthly.

Enjoying and achieving

Outcomes in this area are very good. The quality of early years provision is good and nursery education is very good. Although pupils' progress between Key Stages 1 and 2 is below average, this is more than made up for by a higher than average rate of progress at Key Stages 3 and 4. Standards at Key Stages 2 to 4 are at least in line with averages nationally and for statistical neighbours. Sixth form students at advanced level also make very good progress. The LEA has improved its support for school self-evaluation and effective intervention has contributed to the falling number of schools in formal Ofsted categories. The local authority has embraced the national primary and Key Stage 3 strategies vigorously.

Results at the end of Key Stage 1 are in line with national averages and statistical neighbours. The education service's more rigorous challenge of its schools and the better targeting of support have resulted in significant improvement in attainment at Key Stage 2 over the last four years. Standards in English are now ahead of national levels and in line with statistical neighbours. In mathematics, standards have improved more quickly than nationally, although there is still room for the standards achieved by boys to improve.

Performance in English has also improved at Key Stage 3 and in mathematics standards are rising at a faster rate than in statistical neighbours. The proportion of pupils achieving five or more GCSE at grades A*-C has risen sharply and much more quickly than statistical neighbours and nationally. Good progress has been made in narrowing the achievement gap for children of Pakistani origin and raising the achievement of looked after children.

Attendance is well above national levels and in line with statistical neighbours. There has been substantial improvement in targeted schools, with effective support being provided for individual pupils by the youth service. Support for behaviour and for pupils with emotional and mental health needs is good. Previously high levels of permanent exclusions have now been significantly reduced and in 2004 three-quarters of excluded pupils were reintegrated into mainstream or special schools. Continuing school reorganisation across the authority is addressing the issue of surplus places.

Standards achieved through youth work are good and, for vulnerable groups, very good, with an increasing number of young people achieving qualifications. Children

and young people benefit from a wide range of enrichment activities in schools and these are particularly beneficial for children with sight/hearing impairment and those who are gifted and talented. The effective special needs strategy has helped two-thirds of Year 11 students in mainstream schools to achieve five or more GCSE at grades A*-G.

Making a positive contribution

There are good and improving opportunities for most young people to make a positive contribution. A very high proportion of LAC children contribute to their reviews. Statutory visits to in-house residential services are consistently made and are reported but inspection findings are not always monitored. Communication and consultation strategies are involving a range of young people aided by training of social care staff in alternative communication skills. All children in one special school for children with very complex needs contributed to their own review, in a pilot which is now being rolled out. Participation of children in child protection (CP) conferences and other fora, and children's awareness of how to complain need to be improved.

Parents of disabled children are helped to access direct payments through a voluntary service contract which has successfully increased their use.

The ISL is having a positive impact on health, education and recidivism where performance indicators are all positive comparatively. Support for looked after children at risk of offending has reduced recidivism to a level below the national average. Other young people at risk of re-offending also receive targeted support; those on Youth Offending orders are offered good support. Whilst two thirds of young offenders are in full-time education and training, more needs to be done to engage those who have been persistently less easy to engage. Overall offending has reduced though offences resulting in community sentences have slightly increased. In rural areas young people need to have greater access to the full range of youth activities.

Achieving economic well-being

Outcomes in this area are very good. The local 14-19 strategy and action plan provide a clear vision and framework for 14-19 learning, with strong and appropriate emphases on participation, achievement and progression. The proportion continuing in education and training beyond age 16 has risen to over 92% and the quality of education provided for advanced level students is good. Collaboration in planning and delivering post-16 education is generally good, though a few schools are not yet fully engaged in joint working and the provision for young people seeking entry and intermediate level qualifications (16+) lacks consistency. The DfES Increased Flexibility programme at Key Stage 4 has, however, helped to increase participation in vocational learning and achievement and the LEA is seeking to build on this in further developing its post-16 provision.

Nearly 1000 disaffected or excluded Key Stage 4 students have benefited from two significant support projects over the last two years, with many gaining accreditation and well over half making positive post-16 transitions. The authority has also usefully employed education maintenance allowances to support young people continuing in education and training post-16. These assisted nearly 4000 young people during 2004/5.

Mobile units are used effectively by the youth service to help hard-to-reach young people achieve qualifications. The number of youth offenders in full-time entry to employment programmes post-16 is well below national levels. However recent closer collaboration between the authority and its partners, including Connexions, and a sharper focus on prevention, give greater confidence that the problem can be addressed more successfully. A relatively high number of care leavers (nearly two-thirds) are in education, training or employment at age 19, although there have been some difficulties in care-leavers accessing timely support from the contracted out Aftercare Service.

A greatly increased number of disabled children and their families are receiving support. All Year 9 pupils with special educational needs (SEN) are involved in transition reviews and transition plans are produced. More effective referral processes have recently improved the support provided for children with complex medical and or psychological needs.

SUMMARY

Strengths	Areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • healthy lifestyles promoted through partnerships with key services • participation in sports in schools • improvement in CAMHS. 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • arrangements for sex education in a minority of schools
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • child protection arrangements within social care • stability of placements for LAC • assessment and review processes are effective and timely • ISL (Integrated Support for looked after children). 	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • arrangements for child protection, health & welfare in a minority of schools • there are still waiting lists for some CAMHS services and in some parts of the county • improve consistency of provision of clear health plans for all LAC in care homes • some children's homes need an enhanced level of skill and greater continuity from the staff teams • anti bullying policies need to be harmonised across agencies and departments and increased rigour is needed in monitoring of racist incidents in some schools.
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • quality of early years provision • Improvement in performance at Key stage 2 attainment • improvement in percentage of pupils achieving 5 or more GCSE's at grades A*-C • improvement in the percentage of pupils with SEN achieving 5 or more GCSE's at grades A*-G • progress of 6th form students at advanced level • pupils' attendance at school • reduction in permanent exclusions • standards achieved through youth work. 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • proportion of schools in formal Ofsted categories of concern.

<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • high proportion of looked after children contributing to reviews • contribution of ISL • inclusive consultation mechanisms involving the cross section young people • parents of disabled children are helped to access direct payments. 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • percentage of young offenders in full time education, training or employment • extending opportunities for YP to participate in full range of youth activities in rural areas. • improving participation of children in CP conferences and other fora • increasing young peoples awareness of how to complain.
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • quality of education for post-16 advanced level students • vocational learning programmes at KS4 • proportion of care leavers in education, training or employment at age 19. 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lack of commitment/engagement in collaboration/joint working 14 –19 in some parts of the county • provision for entry level/level 1 students in sixth forms • support for looked after children provided by the contracted out Aftercare service.

Service management

Overall, the council has excellent capacity for further improvement. Strategic leadership and management of services supporting children and young people are very good. The authority has collaborated closely with relevant partners in analysing needs and setting appropriate, challenging targets for improvement. Planning is explicitly focused on improving outcomes for children and young people with performance indicators evidencing much success. The views of parents, carers and children and young people have increasingly been taken into account in establishing priorities for development. Senior officers are well informed and elected members are increasingly becoming more so.

The publication of a commissioning strategy is a notable achievement including partnership commissioning with two nearby authorities. Corporate planning and resource allocation are good. The delivery of improved outcomes within tight financial boundaries evidences that the Council achieves good value for money. From early set up of the local Children & Young People’s Strategic Partnership Board (CYPSPB) two years’ ago, substantial progress is being made in moving towards the production of a single children and young people’s plan from 2006; current service plans are cross referenced and based on the gap analysis and consultation with the CYPSPB.

A change programme is already streamlining structures and bringing the cultures of the education and social services departments into closer alignment. The sharing of data

across education and social care and with health agencies using a proposed virtual warehouse framework is particularly innovative. Regular monitoring in nearly every area ensures the Authority manages its performance proactively. Planned and significant reductions in numbers of looked after children have been achieved year on year. Resources for prevention have increased and the range of services expanded, as reflected in the excellent child protection indicators. Analysis and the use of data are good in most areas, although in the youth service insufficient use is made of the data in monitoring and evaluating the outcomes for young people. Workforce strategies have been implemented for training, development and recruitment and retention. However, there remain challenges for recruitment and retention in residential care and front-line field work teams, foster carers and adopters and in some schools which are facing reorganisation.

Despite the extensive scope of the Change for Children Agenda, the Council's successful track record in managing change suggests there will be continuity of performance in the transition whilst the new Director of Children's Services is recruited. The Council has already made significant changes towards integration of departments. The core priorities of continually improving performance whilst improving quality demonstrate the ambition to ensure services meet the needs of children in Worcestershire.

Areas for exploration in the joint area review

Being healthy

Healthy life-styles are promoted for children and young people:

- progress towards 100% take up of Healthy Schools programme.

Staying safe

The incidence of child abuse and neglect is minimised:

Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities live in safe environments and are protected from abuse and exploitation:

- successful development of more preventative services for children and families from Black and Minority Ethnic Communities and for families of disabled children.

Enjoying and achieving

Action is taken to ensure that educational provision 5-16 is of good quality:

- progress towards eliminating schools from Ofsted categories of concern.

Making a positive contribution

Action is taken to prevent offending and to reduce re-offending by children and young people:

- progress in reducing number of young offenders.

Achieving economic well-being

Action is taken to ensure that 14-19 education and training is planned and delivered in a coordinated way, and to ensure that education and training (16-19) is of good quality:

- 14–19 arrangements including collaboration/joint working; the range of provision for entry level/ Level 1 students and proportion achieving at least Level 2 outcomes by age 19.

Final Judgements

Please see your final annual performance assessment judgements attached at the end of this letter.

Yours sincerely



FLO HADLEY

Divisional Manager
Office for Standards in Education



JONATHAN PHILLIPS

Director – Quality, Performance and Methods
Commission for Social Care Inspection

APA final judgements 2005: Worcestershire County Council

Areas for judgement	Final judgements ¹
The contribution of <i>the local authority's social care services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people	4
The contribution of <i>local authority's education services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people.	4
The contribution of <i>the local authority's children's services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people.	4
The council's overall capacity to improve its services for children and young people	4

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Grade	Service descriptors	Capacity to improve descriptors
4	A service that delivers well above minimum requirements for users	Very good
3	A service that consistently delivers above minimum requirements for users	Good/promising
2	A service that delivers only minimum requirements for users	Adequate
1	A service that does not deliver minimum requirements for users	Inadequate